

VIVIENNE
WESTWOOD

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD
& IAN KELLY

PICADOR

My duty is to understand. To understand the world. This is our exchange for the luck of being alive. From people who have lived before us we can rediscover different visions of the world through art – this is the true meaning of culture – and by comparison, we form our own ideas of a world better than the one we are in, the one that we've made a mess of. We can change our future. In the pursuit of ideas you will start to think, and that will change your life. And if you change your life, you change the world.

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD, 2014

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

*A child sees everything in a state of newness; genius is childhood
recovered at will.*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE,
The Painter of Modern Life

Never dance without a story in your mind.

RUDOLPH NUREYEV

Paris Fashion Week. Spring / Summer Collections 2014.

‘Don’t talk to me now, Ian, I’m really, really busy.’

I am sitting, typing this, beneath a clothes rack, under ninety thousand quid’s worth of frocks. To one side, Vivienne Westwood, in beanie hat and frayed cardigan, is pinning glittery appliqués onto knitwear and evading my questions. On the other, a largely naked model sways on platform heels. We’re somewhere in the 2nd arrondissement. It is three o’clock in the morning.

A few things you need to know about Vivienne:

She seems to be indefatigable. It’ll be dawn soon enough, and she’s still going strong, working as hard as interns fifty years her junior.

She looks fabulous: ‘skin like porcelain’, as her friend Tracey Emin described her to me. She seems to live on apples and tea.

She’s super bright: don’t be fooled by the ditzy-Northerner shtick, she’s sharper than the pins in her sleeve.

She is a tad hard of hearing. I suspect this to be a tactical deafness. It serves her well against the clamour around her.

But mainly what I’ve learned about Vivienne is this: she has maintained the child within herself, against all the odds. Wide-eyed. Inquiring. Open. Stroppy. Mercurial. Dressing up sometimes. Rude,

some of the time. Heart-soaringly loyal and loving at others. She behaves, mainly. Sometimes she goes off on one.

At seventy-three, you might not think that's quite dignified. Not quite the thing for a Dame of the British Empire who is head of a global fashion brand and one of the most famous Englishwomen on the planet. Not very *grand couturier* here in Paris either, for a woman who might easily be admiring her own laurels or resting on them: 'the Coco Chanel of our times', a woman more famous in the Far East than the Queen or Madonna, and who is still cycling down Battersea Bridge Road to work every day in her eighth decade.

If so, this story may not be for you. If you think fashion can never be more than frippery or that seventy-year-olds have *less* right, not more, to lecture the world about its future or bear standards for its past, then you can lay aside this book. As Vivienne said to me the other day, 'it'd save on trees'.

If, on the other hand, you can go the rounds with this punk-grandmother, who is still in the ring, fighting for what she thinks is right and thinks is beautiful when, let's face it, many of her contemporaries have settled for a Shackleton high-seat chair and their memories, then stick with her. You may be in for as much dazzle and as much unexpected insight into the workings of a unique mind as I have had in my year with Vivienne. My Year of Magical Blinging. Because this is a story that is far, far more than fashion, though it is woven with cloth.

'Look: I only mean don't talk to me just *now*, Ian. I mean, I'm thinking. Go and have a drink. They're free. I'm not.'

The other thing you should know about Vivienne is that she can be very funny.

26 September 2013, 2 a.m., and there are sixty hours to go. In sixty hours the new Vivienne Westwood collection will be revealed in Paris for the first time. The Gold Label collection is the flagship line for the Vivienne Westwood Group, and its biannual launches in Paris (spring / summer, then autumn / winter) are the highpoints of the design year for Vivienne. Although there are other collections – Red Label (ready-to-wear) and Red Carpet (as it sounds) amongst them, plus 'diffusion' lines like Anglomania that filter her ideas and classic

designs to other territories under licence, and also a range of menswear ('MAN'), showcased in Milan as well as shows in the Far East and elsewhere – these Paris openings are the mother of all shows for Vivienne. It is the same for all the other fashion houses that crowd out the hotels around the Place Vendôme this time of year. Chanel, Dior, Prada, Comme des Garçons: this week they are all showing their collections, Vivienne's being a partial 'couture' collection showing in Pret à Porter week. These high-end, loss-leader, identity-defining collections are still shop-windowed in Paris despite the rise of rival fashion capitals over recent decades in New York, London, Milan or Hong Kong. Most collections lose money, though Vivienne proudly tells me her Gold Label eventually goes into profit through special orders. Paris Fashion Weeks are the pinnacle of the fashion calendar, and every few hours one show closes and another opens and the pavements of Paris are crammed with matchstick women walking too fast in high heels while talking on cell phones. Seriously: don't get in their way. It is a fracas of fashionistas and trade press; a glossy posse of buyers and models, photographers and liggers, and the focus of many months of work for the London studio of Vivienne Westwood and its Italian cutters and shoe factories. This collection Vivienne has entitled 'Everything is Connected' – and it's the first time I've ever been in Paris except to eat or to try to impress a girlfriend. This time, damn it, I don't get to do either, but all round, it's quite an education.

In the decades during which Vivienne has been a designer, fashion has shifted enormously in the way it markets itself. Her story defines this seismic shift in what fashion is, and in what it means for Western economies like Britain's. Once upon a time the collections were aimed at an outrageously privileged cabal of women who needed outfits to attend galas and diplomatic functions, races and tea parties. What they wore filtered down into the mainstream relatively quickly, via magazines, patterns and rip-offs, but the grand houses made bespoke outfits in tiny, unaffordable numbers, the prices of which nevertheless more nearly reflected the huge number of craftspeople involved in making them. Today, a couture collection is sold at a major loss, though the prices involved are breathtaking. A single Vivienne Westwood outfit might retail off the catwalk at £2,000 to £6,000 – though some have

been known to cost ten times that. Yet this is still only a fraction of the real cost of their creation and original marketing, as they are works of art that have the input of thousands of man-hours and dozens of highly skilled individuals. Fashion Week makes no sense. The goal is to grab the attention of a much wider public, increasingly via the Internet, who might buy versions of these styles, or buy into the name that is figureheaded here in Paris. Nevertheless, these Paris collections are in a sense Fashion at its purest: Fashion as Art. Fashion that reflects its moment in time. Fashion, as Vivienne now has it, that might even change the world.

So these collections draw crowds both in person and especially online quite out of proportion to the number of people involved in wearing or even making the clothes. During Fashion Week, Paris is the epicentre of a singular phenomenon of our age: the new global fascination with fashion, a novel language, mainly online, fusing design and marketing, fame, art, sensuality and politics that has no real parallel in cultural history but can be traced also to Vivienne's early punk work bringing together fashion, music, celebrity and the zeitgeist. So don't think this is frippery for rich bitches. Well, it can be. But it is also a major part of the global economy, and a vital story in what Europe now is. It is a shopfront. Paris during Fashion Week is a metaphor for one way the global economy is heading, a trade fair on an epic scale, but also a marketing happening for Old World style, fusing fashion, music and a new narrative about being. And selling, increasingly, to China.

Hundreds of thousands are following what's happening online. There are scores of professional fashion journos and bloggers at Vivienne's shows alone, representing the emerging markets of the Far East and Brazil and Russia and focusing the concentrated attention of vast crowds, in their bedrooms and offices and high streets, from Hong Kong to Sao Paolo to Moscow. Cable TV and now the Internet have revolutionized fashion, and nowhere is this clearer than in the story of Vivienne Westwood, whose name is known across the globe as a result of what happens and happened in Paris. Paris is the international huckster for all the accessories and perfumes and magazines that feed off fashion, all of them circling what begat them in the first place:

Vivienne and the much-anticipated running order.



couture. And here in the centre of it all is Vivienne, one-time King's Road punk and now a global luxury brand herself, maintaining her wry amusement at the business that is show, maintaining in the face of all this brouhaha her calm passion for beauty, especially beauty wrought in cloth. And all the while campaigning constantly, via fashion, for the higher goals of art and politics as she sees them, and the highest standards in what she makes.

It should also be noted that a Paris Fashion Week is one of the few times in the year when Vivienne Westwood, scourge of the British Establishment, grandmum, mother and eco-activist, turns her manxome gaze directly and to the complete exclusion of all else on that which has made her world-famous: clothes. A lot of the rest of the year, there is much else that occupies her days. But not in Paris. Paris is devoted to fashion. It is therefore perhaps the best place to begin to understand Vivienne, in this moment of creative calm, hectic though it is, and – oh shit – 4 a.m. though it now is, in this storm of activity that is Vivienne Westwood's regular rhythm of being. Paris Fashion Week ends this weekend, with Vivienne's Gold Label collection as one of its closing highlights. And there are less than three days to go . . .

Number 13 rue du Mail, just behind the Palais Royale and Paris's Bibliothèque Nationale, has been turned upside down this week. It's a swanky old building, much knocked around by war and corporate usage, but once home to Liszt, and later the Gestapo, and now housing the Paris showrooms of Vivienne Westwood in the building's former ballroom. For three days in September each year this space is transformed into the base unit for the creation of the Vivienne Westwood Gold Label catwalk show. The show itself will take place elsewhere.

Walking up the rue du Mail, it is clear to me which is the Vivienne Westwood showroom, and what's going on. Girls with unfeasibly long legs and limpid eyes traipse in and out and onto the backs of waiting moped couriers. They are the models. Newly migrated from Milan like feeding locusts, indistinguishably and implacably beautiful and all dressed in black, their faces nude of make-up and blank, they come and go on the back of motorbikes, casting to casting, their stilettos in their bags, their legs wrapped around the dudes who work as model-

couriers. With two days to go to the main collections, it's casting day for the shows. I follow the girls inside.

The ballroom-showroom is divided by ten industrial-sized clothes racks from which hang maybe a hundred unique couture items: satin ballgowns, Grecian draped viscose, wool and linen tailored suits, cotton knitwear dresses. A million pounds' worth of frocks. On one wall, a display cabinet holds the entire range of Vivienne Westwood handbags; on another, the jewellery. Against yet another wall is a small encampment of desks and screens and mobile phones, the buzzing hive of event managers, presided over by Kiko Gaspar, sleek, efficient and Portuguese, and dressed head to toe in Vivienne Westwood. Another corner, and an impromptu studio has been set up, a cyclorama with nuclear-white lights, and a desk where a shaven-headed Italian graphics designer makes photos sharper, crisper, whiter. These are the images of the girls in catwalk outfits, to be printed and shuffled like a deck of cards into the catwalk running order.

The clothes, shoes and knitwear have just arrived from Vivienne's Italian factories and London studio. The jewellery for this collection has been impounded by customs at Calais. No one seems perturbed or alarmed at this last-minute glitch. Some of the clothes are less than half made, with pieces lying on cutting tables between sheets of her logo-stamped tissue paper. The casting session with the models doubles as a fitting for the couture items. No one seems bothered either that ten-thousand-pound outfits are in pinned segments on the floor, with two and a bit days to go before they are on view to the world. So I pick my way over them and through the queues of models awaiting their auditions. Shoes are lined up on the ballroom staircase, like glass slippers for a hundred punk Cinderellas. There is a low hum of mobile-phone conversations. I can make out five languages.

More and more people seem to be arriving all the time, with no one discernibly in control or clocking anyone in or out. The entry requirement appears to be at least one item of Vivienne Westwood design and an air of cool. A tattoo seems to help. In the centre of the room, commanding by a simple presence and the accident of great height, is forty-eight-year-old Andreas Kronthaler, Vivienne's husband.

What will be news to no one in fashion, but perhaps unfamiliar to those who know only Vivienne Westwood's name, is that her work today is co-designed by her husband and creative collaborator of two decades. When they met, she was a visiting professor of fashion in Vienna and he was one of her design students. Mr and Mrs Kronthaler have been together for about twenty-five years, which is also roughly the age gap between them. More on this later. For now, it is clear to everyone in the room that Andreas is the centre of things as much as Vivienne, and in the context of Fashion Week he has a certain advantage. He combines the looks of a rough-trade Jeremy Irons with the accent of Arnold Schwarzenegger. This, combined with a disturbingly mesmeric gaze and the build of a Tyrolean blacksmith (the family trade), makes Andreas an unlikely figure in Parisian haute couture. Everyone, including Vivienne, appears to be slightly in love with him. And one singular impression of this whole experience has been to watch at close quarters a couple at work together, in somewhat stressful circumstances, who nevertheless are conspicuously easy and happy partners in life, in art and in shared trade.

Less easy to spot at first is Vivienne herself, somewhere behind the clothes rails, wearing a headband sloganed, appropriately enough, *Chaos*.

'I can't talk to you just now, Ian – but I will.'

Each of the potential models is being photographed, some of them in the outfits that might be worn. Those who will be chosen are marked on a board with a red dot, like a sold work of art, by the model-booker Maiwenn. Maiwenn is working a Pearl-Harbor-geisha look with Vivienne Westwood Anglomania shoes and is the keeper of the gate so far as models are concerned. The red dots go on the girls' noses. Green dots mean they fit the clothes too. Which is an advantage but not an insuperable obstacle for those who do not, as the clothes have not all been made. Issa, who combines a Japanese ancestry with great height and strong bearing, may open the show. Ajuma, from Nairobi, a Vivienne regular, is back for the first time after the birth of her child. Marta, from Valencia, who won a modelling competition but should still be at school, is as excited as a puppy and as beautiful as the day, still alive to the drama of it all, the sheer little-girl dressing-up party

that is a Paris catwalk show. Most of the others exude an air of glamorous ennui, accessorized with iPods.

When I leave them all to meet a *Vogue* editor, the line-up of both girls and dresses is beginning to emerge.

‘It’s availability as much as chemistry,’ explains Maiwenn. ‘Vivienne’s is not the highest-paying gig in town; it never has been, so we may lose some of the girls. On the other hand, this is the party they all want to be at, even if their agents don’t. That’s how we all feel about Vivienne.’

Thirty hours to go, and I am again cross-legged at the clothes rail under a bolero jacket, this one apparently made of chenille and cobwebs. It is being pinned and restitched by Vivienne. Surrounded as we are by some of the world’s most beautiful women in various states of nakedness, and fabrics and creations of both beauty and oddity in various states of unpreparedness, Vivienne nevertheless manages to concentrate simultaneously on a press release that explains the collection, scraps of paper like fabric samples arranged around her slowly coagulating into prose.

At this juncture I should introduce you to the Vivienne Westwood players dotted around the room. I can’t see a chain of command here as such. There’s no call sheet, no director. Things happen by stealth and by osmosis: word spreads. People whisper. These seem to be the main cast: there’s Vivienne and Andreas, obviously. They loiter between the boards of pictures and the half-screened dressing rooms where the naked models change. Andreas paces. Vivienne sits, or works on a mannequin. As the hours tick by, the models are more often being dressed in full view of everyone. Christopher Di Pietro – head of marketing and merchandising – comes and goes, and is deferred to on all things non-design. Brought up variously in London, Paris and Ulster, ex French military, now sporting Vivienne Westwood ensembles so striking he is accosted in Paris restaurants and a beard that half masks his Gallic good looks, Christopher is a voice of clear intelligence and one of the many wise and loving presences Vivienne has arrogated to her business. Carlo D’Amario, CEO and Italian godfather to Vivienne Westwood ‘Inc.’, is also in and out. Looking like a Borgia pope, shaven-headed, powerfully built, Carlo likes to let it be known that he is

responsible for the economic success story of the Vivienne Westwood Group, and on this Vivienne concurs. Certainly they go way back, he and Vivienne, all the way to the King's Road in the 1980s and a brief love affair in Italy. He is only to be seen properly at the Gold Label show itself and afterwards with the Italian lawyers and Far Eastern buyers. Likewise, the 'big three' in design terms, after Vivienne and Andreas, are absent until the show. Murray Blewett and Mark Spye, design managers who have been with Vivienne since the early eighties, and Brigitte Stepputtis, head of couture, are all intimately involved with the making of any collection and also its later dissemination. The teddybear presence of Alex Krenn, who does all the graphics on textiles, and the married graphics team of Joe and Beata De Campos, make up the visual language of Vivienne Westwood on cloth and paper. Kiko Gaspar, from Lisbon, is head of events, so this is his battle if not his war. He smiles at everyone while not quite making eye contact: a general benediction and a general admonishment to get the fuck on with it. He seems to be surgically implanted with a headset. In the showroom and later backstage, Peppe the super-on-trend design assistant and his friend Ilaria seem to be at the centre of things creatively, with stylists Yasmin and Rachel. Make-up is a separate command structure, as is hair, field-commanded by Val Garland and Sam McKnight respectively. Maiwenn Le Gall and Brice Compagnon sit at one of the few desks, casting models. They live on Planet Fashion, but it appears to be a happy place for them. Rafael, heavily bearded in the way of this year's menswear looks, beams constantly through the haze of sleep loss. Westwood archivist and assistant, Rafael solves all problems for all people while running coffees and food from the kitchenette to the showroom. His ready laughter and indeed his ability to explain what the fuck is happening make him my lodestar through the strangeness of it all. This is a role usually played by Tizer Bailey, Vivienne's PA, a woman who combines ethereal beauty – she was one of Vivienne's signature models in the nineties – with the soothing efficiency of the perfect Home Counties head girl and a rather dirty laugh. Then there is Benedikt, another six-foot-three Austrian, with blond hair down his back, currently held up by pencils. He is Andreas's assistant, and recruited, like so many others here – Georg, Alex, Brigitte – from some

part of the Habsburg empire where all tempers and histrionics are banned. Truly, I've seen more drama and tantrums at WH Smith's than at Vivienne Westwood's. It's almost disappointing.

'You need to know, this is a great place to be. We want to be working here,' says Christina Nahler, an intern. 'I'm *paying* to be here, to get here, I mean, but I am learning much more than I would anywhere else. And it means something, you know; it's fashion for a reason, and with a story. I mean: this is *Vivienne-fucking-Westwood*. We're part of a legend.'

Twenty-eight hours to go and now it's the styling of the chosen models, the creation of the entire 'look'; which shoes go with which dress, and then the compiling of a running order – the much vaunted 'story' of this collection, along with hair and make-up tests. Andreas is fitting girls to outfits.

'We tell a story,' smiles Andreas from under his thick eyelashes and baseball cap, 'that's why people pay attention. What we are doing, it is fashion like it used to be. Vivienne is constant. You recognize what we make because it is not fashion; it is a story about her, and her reaction to the world.'

The temperature has gone up about ten degrees. The interns sew.

The models who have been booked for tomorrow turn up for fittings and loiter around, changing in and out of outfits and footling on iPhones, being photographed. Walls fill with glossy printouts of them in differing looks, their hair uniformly drab. The air is heavy with expensive scent and nervous laughter. The last of the shoes, mis-sent to London, arrive and take their place on the grand staircase, the cavalcade of heels. The collection's jewellery is still impounded, but otherwise everything is now here, and everything is unwrapped from a growing mountain of tissue paper, all of it stamped with the distinctive Westwood logo of royal orb and Saturn-rings. It looks like Christmas Day, sponsored by Vivienne Westwood.

Of the thirty or so models needed, fourteen are now booked: red dots on their noses and green dots on their bodies. Five are on standby. Many of the top girls are booked to other designers and catwalks through the afternoon, girls with names like Dasha and Iekeline – girls from every corner of the globe and of every ethnicity who have in common only their preternatural beauty, height and need for a good

meal. Their average age is nineteen. My flirty conversation with Marta is broken up by her manager. Who turns out to be her father. Who turns out to be slightly younger than myself. As the day runs into evening, more and more models arrive. It's going to be an all-nighter, and the salads and fruits provided for the girls are replaced with butter cookies and chocolates and the constant burr of the espresso machine.

The creation of the look of the show is not just down to the clothes. It is a stage show featuring lights and music and themed hair and make-up. This is a specialist art form all of its own.

'I adore working with Vivienne,' says Val Garland, exponent of this rarefied art form, taking a pause from testing a Kabuki-white face paint. 'It's a creative holiday.'

'The girls love working here,' says the model-booker, 'because they are treated with enormous respect, and they become part of the story. Which is easy to forget. With Vivienne and Andreas, it's all calm and respect, and both are quite unusual in our business.'

To one side, Mr and Mrs Calm and Respectful are bickering over knitwear:

'It looks a mess, Vivienne,' says Andreas.

'No, look, Andreas, look: you can just stitch around and around and tie it here: that was my idea; there's plenty of room.' Vivienne demonstrates. Andreas shrugs.

'You just leave it on,' Vivienne whispers to the intern, 'and don't show him.'

Twenty-three hours to go. The press and marketing team from London arrive. Giordano Capuano, Laura McCuaig and Victoria Archer set up shop halfway up the grand staircase, scrambling for power sockets and Wi-Fi connections, stuffing envelopes with VIP invitations and 'access all areas' wristbands. Because I am used to seeing them in the London HQ of the Vivienne Westwood Group, all three of them invariably exuding elegant executive style and fashion savvy (though Giordano is keen to point out to me that he is as much a devotee of rugby as couture), it feels odd to see them huddled like students at a sit-in, fretting over their piles of papers and lists. It's every man and woman for themselves. They work harder than anyone I know outside of medicine, and, like stressed doctors, combine this

with an enviable ability to party through the night when the job requires it. Which it occasionally does. The press teams from the Far East and from the International wing of the VW Group arrive and set up slightly to one side. The Taiwanese team produce a ‘celebrity’ profile of the Far Eastern stars who will be in attendance; Annie Chen and the rock star Wubai, ‘one of the biggest in Southeast Asia’, are illustrated with Google-images so that they might be treated with suitable deference.

Sometimes, not always, out of a Vivienne Westwood show one girl emerges who ends up being the ‘look’ of the collection. Naomi Campbell was it in 1993, in part because she fell off her platform shoes on the runway. Sara Stockbridge became the poster girl for Vivienne’s late-eighties tweeds and crinolines.

‘It may or may not be the first girl, or the last girl in the wedding dress,’ Vivienne explains to me later. ‘Andreas is a genius at choosing, at getting the perfect girl for the perfect look. I remember once Naomi Campbell in tears wanting to wear this amazing glittery dress, with metal flowers made by Andreas’s father, and Linda Evangelista was going to wear it, and Andreas said, “Naomi, you’d look like Diana Ross” – in my opinion no one is better at choosing than Andreas, or dealing with models.’ Ajuma, from Nairobi, and Marta from Valencia seem to be in the running for this year’s girls.

‘She’s my biggest supporter in the industry,’ says Ajuma, former Kenyan 400-metre sprint champion and one of many ‘girls of colour’ (as she puts it) chosen by Vivienne and Andreas. ‘In New York and London and also in Kenya with our charity work, we work together. It’s like a reunion when I see them. In the campaign we did there [Vivienne supports a charity that makes her bags in Kenya, through the United Nations International Trade Centre Ethical Fashion Initiative] I went with them to places I had *never* been – hard-core slums . . . they are brave people . . . but in Paris, I always want to be in their show. I’ve just had a child. But now I am back, so it feels like: let’s see if I’ve still got “it”!’ The running order, and the first and last girl positions remain, until the last moment, up for grabs.

Vivienne takes off her fake-crocodile pumps and pads around in her socks, arranging folds of knitwear over the semi-naked form of Silvia.

The loose hanging tabards of knit are tied and stretched into a ruched stocking, ablaze with appliqué and ruffled around the buttocks and below the breast in a classic Westwood line. Here she is. Beatific. At work. At one with cloth and needle and living body. 'Vivienne is at her happiest now,' whispers Christopher as he passes by. And so she is, working on into the night.

More staff arrive: cutters and design team members as well as more interns and press officers. In total, a workforce of sixty people, representing eighteen hundred man-hours over the course of these three days that will make up the Paris show. The numbers mount. Layer on layer of expense and industry, as well as art: the palimpsest of luxury in action: sixty 'looks'; twenty-nine models; forty hair and make-up professionals. Eight hundred and fifty-seven named guests. Two hundred pairs of handmade shoes. A million pounds' worth of clothes. A budget of over £200,000 on the event. It is costing the VW group directly a mere £120,000, but there are also sponsors to keep happy, along with the international press. Everyone involved wants constant updates and images for their respective blogs and PR teams, and Victoria and Laura dutifully feed snippets of information and a draft version of Vivienne's press release text – typed-up and almost ready now – gleaned from the notes and quotations strewn around the showroom.

Early in the wee hours, Vivienne's finished press release circulates. She quotes Shakespeare, references the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and Frida Kahlo, and, in her new-minted title 'Everything is Connected', makes allusion to E. M. Forster. 'I often think of the titles,' Vivienne tells me. 'I'm good at that.' 'Everything is Connected' invitations, still smelling of printer's ink, are pressed into envelopes in Kiko's corner. They sport a logo for the collection hand-drawn by Vivienne herself of two serpents eating each other's tails, an ancient emblem of aggressive symbiosis used to express the economy devouring the planet. 'This is the main message of the Climate Revolution and of my life now: that everything each one of us thinks or says or does can make a difference,' she says. Everything is connected.

The call comes to listen to the music that will accompany the show. Composer Dominik Emrich samples widely, from baroque

court marches to English madrigals and folkloric Cretan pipes. There's a snippet of Alfred Schnittke and some Saint-Saëns underscored with an insistent beat both dancery and portentous: 'like *bang* – it's the end of the world – *watch out!*' booms Andreas, beaming one of his high-energy smiles. He's a man having fun: either high on fashion or determined to fight sleep deprivation with laughter. Vivienne is more contemplative. She struggles to hear these days if there is a buzz of background noise. 'I can't hear what's being *said*,' she complains of Dominic's offstage mantra, '*the Oracles of Mother Earth . . . the trail of blood*', which would please her as a refrain, I dare say, if she could hear it. The conversation between Andreas and Vivienne meanwhile ranges from shoes to bags to hairstyles to confusion over how to describe the look of it all: 'It should all be *opposite*,' says Andreas, indicating lopsided hairdos. 'You mean *opposite*,' Vivienne corrects. And then Rosita Cataldi and Paola Iacopucci of the Westwood Italian factory arrive, bearing flowers and kisses for Vivienne, who lights up in the warm embrace of friends. The chatter turns easily and fluently to Italian, a softer sound in Vivienne's mouth than her native English, sensuous and light-filled.

Fifteen hours to go, but a long night stretches ahead. 'It has to be last minute – you have to have all the molecules in one place, and then *whoosh*.' Andreas gestures a tree growing or an atomic mushroom cloud, his physical theatre as expansive and indeterminate as his accent. 'We do it for ourselves, you see, Vivienne and I, making things as perfect as can be. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. So long as *we* know every girl looks amaaaazing.'

Fourteen hours to go. In fairness, I've been out at Café de Flore knocking back espressos and whisky while trying to keep up with the fashion talk – but Vivienne, when I return at 2 a.m., is up to her neck in the running order and the music and models. Do these people ever sleep? They are now trying the 'show pieces': that is to say, items that will never be made commercially, but which might feature in a *Vogue* editorial or could, perhaps, be ordered bespoke by a favoured and moneyed client. The main focus seems to be around a metallic knitted bikini, which may or may not be paired with drapes or a knitted vest in tomorrow's couture show. It is, it has to be said, very sexy. The house model is used for the final fittings and pinnings, and she is as

unflaggingly upbeat as she is beautiful. A concentrated calm seems to have descended upon Vivienne, born of many years in the business and many Paris collections. She ponders snapshots of models, and mouths to me, or herself, or anyone who might be listening, 'I've no idea what we are going to do,' but she clearly does. There are twenty-nine pink-edged body bags laid out on the floor, with the names and mugshots of the booked models – the clothes bags that will hold their outfits. Two each. The names are mainly indistinguishable Middle European.

'It's been the way, this last decade,' explains Rafael, the assistant.

'Slavic cheekbones and cool manner – it's not what Vivienne is famous for, but models with attitude and sex appeal are more difficult to find these days. Perfection is easy,' opines the model-booker.

Finally the press release is ready, whittled down by Laura and amended by Andreas with a fashiony sign-off to his 'Darlings', which may or may not be tongue-in-cheek.

'I am going to call the show "Everything is Connected"; Vivienne has written, 'because that is the main message of the Climate Revolution and of my life, that everything each one of us thinks or says or does can make a difference.'

Thirteen and a half hours to go. It's three in the morning, and the collection and its running order are complete. Vivienne sits hunched in a chair, her legs swollen, she complains, her eyes a little bloodshot, sipping at a glass of red wine. Andreas drinks white.

'It's all about the order at this stage, really. We have to get it right, and especially what goes first. It sets the tone.' In the end, one of the Frida Kahlo-inspired ensembles is to go first, worn by an angular and androgynous Japanese model. The picture of her has been moved around the board numerous times, but keeps going back to the top. Ajuma will wear the white column dress; Marta, amongst other looks, the chenille lace. A lot of last-minute attention goes too on items of styling that will pull together the story – the idea of pilgrimage, the references to Kahlo – some of which are just now being made: headdresses with giant flowers and antique ribbon; garlands and walking staffs. 'There is no one better at this than Andreas,' reflects Vivienne, 'at styling. We carry on until it's right. It's about perfection,

and when you see it, there it is, and then you can go to bed.' Vivienne and Andreas help finalize prices that have been argued over in London and Italy already, and that range from merely expensive to oligarch-unaffordable. It's late, and some of this can wait until after the show and the sales days that happen back at the showroom once it's all over.

Four in the morning, and apparently it's impossible to get a cab in Paris in Fashion Week. It takes me an hour and a half to walk back to my friends' apartment. What Vivienne Westwood shoes lack in obvious practicality they make up for, it turns out, in comfort and durability. The men's ones, anyway.

Five hours to go. I've slept a little. Most of the VW team have not. They moved at 8 a.m. from the showroom on the rue du Mail to the venue for the show itself, which had a team of builders and set decorators in overnight to create the show space and backstage areas. Normally 18 rue du Quatre Septembre, near the Bourse, is a bank. Its grandiose central atrium, part Victorian opera house, part futuristic hangar, gives it the air of a *Blade Runner* set revamped by Tim Burton. It's vast. You could fly a small aeroplane down its central hallway. You have to enter up a huge staircase, guarded by stentorian security staff sporting regulation dark glasses, Hugo Boss suits and a menacing manner, and through security barriers, all of which gives the right meet-the-queen ambience. Music thunders around us, a soundcheck for Dominik's music, and the composer himself is huddled over a computer console, chewing his scarf, trying to arrange the finale that will accompany Vivienne and Andreas for the catwalk curtain call. Beyond the atrium, and visible through a tangle of glass bridges and translucent floors, the bank drops away three floors underground. Escalators rise up from this subterranean vaulting, and it is via these that the models will rise, and then descend, looping around a hexagonal catwalk with a phalanx of photographers – eighty are expected. Giant mirrors have been hung over this gallery space so that the models are reflected ascending and descending like angels on Jacob's ladder, but they also serve to reflect the audience, and indeed the press photographers themselves, through the looking glass.

In the basement area, flooded with daylight, forty dressing-room stations have been erected, ablaze with lightbulbs and frenetic with

activity. Val and Sam are recreating their mud-spattered look by flicking brown body paint off brushes. The girls blink.

Two hours to showtime, and Kiko calls a production meeting. Two dozen international staff of the Vivienne Westwood Group, speaking over twelve languages in total, all there to greet and seat the press, the clients, buyers and sponsors from their respective corners of the world. A third of the seating is given over to the Far East, with press and buyers from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan. 'It's an extraordinary venue,' Kiko rallies the troops. 'Let's make it a great show!' Such is the crush on the steps that Laura topples backwards off her Vivienne Westwood heels, a domino effect only just averted by one of the many men in Vivienne Westwood tartan suits.

There are three tiers of seating and a strict hierarchy as to who sits where. 'It's rather like Versailles must have been,' quips my French friend. The British and American and Far East press are all front row, up where they can see the models first. In another corner, but with prime view, are the couture buyers: the select women and men who buy Westwood Gold Label designs off the catwalk, to wear or to collect. One loyal customer has been known to buy every single outfit from the season's collection, an outlay of many hundreds of thousands of pounds. *Time*, *Harper's Bazaar*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Telegraph*, *Marie Claire*, the *New York Times*, the *International Herald Tribune* are afforded prime seats. *Vogue* is accorded a lot of seating, for its various international representatives. And there on the front row of the international glossies is Gene Krell of *Vogue* Japan. Gene Krell, former proprietor of *Granny Takes a Trip* and consequently a fashion legend as the man who sold glam-rock to London, was also once Vivienne's lodger – saved solely, according to his own account, by Vivienne from heroin addiction and early death.

Down below, the models wear T-shirts printed with 'VW GOLD LABEL SS [spring / summer] 2014', their elaborate pompadours in hairnets, looking like rockabilly Nora Battys. Most wear nothing else but thongs.

Ninety minutes to go. The Shoe Rehearsal. This is a ritual of couture shows, but of particular importance for Vivienne Westwood's as her shoes are famously high, and, after Naomi Campbell's notorious 1993

fall from them on the catwalk, worth rehearsing in. Six-foot models, six-inch platforms, plus an arrival onto the catwalk from a moving escalator, demand an attentive dress rehearsal. The last of the girls arrive.

In theory we are now only half an hour away from the show. It's 4 p.m., and the call comes from the Paris Federation that the previous shows have overrun, so we are likely to go up at 4.45. There is a palpable sense of relief. Vivienne pulls gowns off shoulders, rearranges elaborate Frida Kahlo garlands and laurels, and photographers snap at everything. The girls are used to it, and pose against stark white and black backgrounds: perfect, serious, and then flirty and playful, hanging out in twos and threes and posing for the myriad smartphones and anonymous photographers who also have 'access all areas'. They are snapped between outfits and with their hair still in nets. They are snapped in their knickers and half naked. There is no place that is not on view, and about to be online.

Vivienne, in headscarf and glasses, has suddenly the air of a madam at a madcap bordello: 'I'm quite tired, actually,' she allows, 'but it's beautiful, isn't it, when it comes together?'

Five minutes to go. Apparently there is an emergency. There is a tsunami approaching, a moving tide of obsequious humanity and arc lamps, with at its centre the diminutive but instantly recognizable form of Pamela Anderson. Slightly under normal height, even in Vivienne Westwood heels, Pamela is nonetheless ablaze with big hair and celebrity wattage. A loyal, if recent, muse in the world of Vivienne, she has flown in from LA simply for this event, booking a bank of suites at the Plaza Athénée hotel. Dinner afterwards will be with Pamela and a former Westwood model called Carla Bruni who seems to be quite well known in Paris. 'Just a few friends: we're all very tired,' explains Christopher. Pamela, Carla and Vivienne have a lot to catch up on in their shared world of eco-politics and animal rights. Who knew?

And so, Suzy Menkes finally sits down and Pamela Anderson is in place, and the show begins, half an hour late and exactly three minutes before Vivienne would get fined by the Paris Federation. The lights dim and an arc lamp leers over the rig a hundred feet above us to pick out the first model as she steps onto the escalator up towards the atrium.

The giant mirrors reflect the photographers as well as the opening girl, and four hundred and fifty expensively perfumed necks crane upwards. The atrium erupts with flashbulbs, and like two hundred crocuses instantly coming into bloom, a field of smartphones are raised amongst the audience, everywhere but on the front row. On the front row, one doesn't take one's own photographs.

The long struggle over, the running order appears to have settled into a montage that begins with Frida Kahlo, moves into the colours and textures of pilgrimage and folklore, and ends up with some nods to serious couture and Yves Saint Laurent and the structured baroque tailoring that made Vivienne's name as a couturier in the years after punk. The girls all adopt the super-serious, super-sexy steeliness that is their professional armour. Twelve minutes seems a long time. In the absence of real narrative or language, and given the insistent rhythm of one girl after another every thirty seconds, the show does get difficult to ingest. That, and the sheer visual overload. The colours and shapes, the preternatural beauty of the clothes and the girls; it is occasionally as if the world has decelerated into slow motion. As they walk away and out of my view, the clothes move in gravity-defying billows, airy nothings that hold the weight of a fashion empire's expectations, but also manage to laugh a little at the beauty that can be wrought with cloth and the human form. Here I am; touched by beauty. Mark Spye, I see suddenly as we stand at the end, is in tears of rapture. Not what you expect of a burly man of fifty in a lumberjack shirt. 'It's one of her great collections,' he opines. 'It's what she does best.'

And it's over. There is a slight kerfuffle over whether Andreas or Vivienne will arrive first on the catwalk, and in the confusion the bouquet is lost that Vivienne should carry. And they hold hands around the catwalk, until Andreas breaks off to join the applause for Vivienne, who smiles shyly, as is her wont, to accept her ovation.

You've got to wonder. Quarter of a million quid. Twelve minutes. Sixty outfits. Eighteen hundred man-hours. You do have to wonder what the point of all that really is. As Lord Chesterfield opined (about sex, but it holds for couture), the spectacle is ridiculous, the price exorbitant, and the pleasure momentary. The world must be peopled, but



Vivienne and Andreas, the catwalk bow, minus bouquet.

surely it has been peopled with enough fashion? Anyone can see the sheer ravishing beauty of cloth moving over perfect bodies. There is everything to be said, here in Paris especially, for the perfecting of any human art form as a discipline, a craft, a religion. But in the cult of fashion, as opposed to, say, fine art or even food, there is a fetishizing of 'now' that works its own magic, to the detriment, sometimes, of the art form itself. It's about the economy, stupid. Which of these designs will stand the test of time? Why design more and more and more? How can Vivienne justify the expense, the air miles, the sheer concentrated focus of hundreds of supremely talented and largely underpaid individuals? It is to her credit that she takes on board these criticisms and suspicions, and addresses some of them head-on. My Year with Vivienne has taught me more than most men are ever blessed with knowing about why fashion might matter, and what it is that draws its devotees back to the altar of Vivienne's art, and what keeps her creating. There's the industrial imperative, of course – the economic one. A lot of people now rely for their living on Vivienne and Andreas's ongoing creativity. There is something more at work also: a passion for the importance of fashion at the centre of cultural life, and a passion to explain the world as Vivienne sees it, through clothes.

Vivienne is at the centre of a swirling mass of fashion journalists after the show. Cameras and live television coverage: the epicentre, albeit briefly, of the moving media tornado of Fashion Week. She takes it in her stride, perhaps the only woman in the room not greatly exercised about her clothes or her appearance, assured that her style will shine through. She parries brief fashion interviews in French, Italian and German, though mainly in the international language of fashion that is Anglo-American. Even the Taiwanese have Carrie Bradshaw accents. Thick Derbyshire cuts through all of this, nonetheless:

'I had a vision of a girl on a pilgrimage . . .'

The next morning, slightly hung-over, I sit with Vivienne in the showroom before the buyers arrive.

'Some places give birth to legends,' says Vivienne, 'like Venus from the island of Cythera.' This is not, of course, the sort of answer you expect to 'Do you like Paris?', but bear with her. 'Paris changed

everything for me. Here's the thing. I get myself into situations. The reason I'm sitting here in Paris with you and am a dress designer is because I thought it was my duty to be one. For Malcolm, my boyfriend at the time, to help him out. I said, "Malcolm, either I help you in the music business or you help me in the shop. One or the other. You decide." He said, "Fashion every time." But then he went off into the music business! So that's when I made the decision to carry on, to prove something to myself, and that's when I did the first proper collections and that's when I came to Paris. And fell in love, really. And like being in love, it was as if I'd always known: I'd always known Paris was important to me, and I'd always known, in a sense, that I had things to say in fashion. People seem surprised still that you can have been in punk and then also be in couture, but it's all connected. That's why we called one early collection Punkature. It's not about fashion, you see; for me, it's about the story. It's about ideas.

'But we should start in Paris, because it is the centre of that part of my life that is clothes. The very first time I came to Paris was with Malcolm's punk band, The New York Dolls – they were going to do a gig in Paris. And it wasn't till years later that I came to appreciate it properly: its art and history. Because of my friend Gary Ness. I'll tell you about him later. But I'll say this now: there are things I can only say in this book because time has passed and some people – Malcolm, Gary – are no longer here. I think a lot about Gary when I am in Paris. We made incredible statements in Paris, with Gary's input, because he did know what he was talking about historically. My point is, I get my ideas because I'm interested in the past. I'm interested in geniuses of the past: the best selves people have tried to be before. I'm interested in people's vision of the world in the past. We can learn so much from what has happened before; their ideals and their hopes for the future. And you feel that very strongly here.

'It was Malcolm's idea that we needed to do a Paris show. It was the early 1980s and we had got a French PA, Sylvie Grumbach, who was very good. This was my third collection. We had done the Pirates, the Savages, and this was the Buffalo collection. The official title was "Nostalgia of Mud", along with the shop we then had. The start of New Romanticism. That was me! We had done Buffaloes in Olympia

and we decided to do a repeat of it in Paris. The reason being I'd had the experience by 1981–2 over and over and over again of seeing my things copied and put on Paris catwalks. Punk stuff for instance got copied all over Paris.

'So we did a show in Paris, at Angelina's Café on the rue de Rivoli. Compared to now, of course, it was all done on a shoestring, but it was much more exciting. And not just because it was new to me or I was younger. In those days fashion magazines would see the show, and then the next day they would borrow your clothes and do a shoot. Simple. It was all done in one go. French *Vogue*. Italian *Vogue*. Even American *Vogue* used to do it like that. Italian and American *Vogue*: they made me. It was so immediate. So exciting. You knew the effect you were having. Instant feedback. Of course the fashion world was smaller then too.

'I wasn't nervous. Not a bit. I've never, ever been nervous. Not about the clothes. Ever. I say to myself, "I love them, and that's my best." The first Paris show, the Buffaloes collection in 1983, was a sensation. It was in all the newspapers, as well as the magazines. It was so exciting. But it took years and years before I felt that I was at all accepted in Paris like I am now or could really safely call myself a designer. The people who always mentioned me were the Italians. I owe Italy a lot. Italian *Vogue* and American *Vogue*: they were wonderful about me, my two main supporters early on, because of what they saw in Paris. So, even early on, Paris began to change everything for me. Less punk. Less tabloid. I began to be taken seriously. But not because of Parisians or the fashion press of France. The first people I got the real support from were the Italians, the Americans and especially the Japanese who came to Paris buying for boutiques. Because here's what was happening: it's funny, and I'll tell you this and I shouldn't, but John Galliano, at that time, for instance, he was such a fan of me and he copied the clothes very closely and I know this because he used to come into the shop. And I went with a friend of mine in Paris to see John's show, and she loved it, and rightly, and so did I, but that's because it was *my* show from the year before. I just thought, well, fashion: it's really weird. But it *is*. Weird. People wrote that I was unwearable, but then there it all was the next season and the one after that, copied by others, sold for

much more money, with much more backing. I don't know. And that upset me at the time, definitely it did. I knew my clothes were great, though, and that I had time on my side. But it was weird and it was undermining.

'So that's some of my Paris story. Where it all began. You see, designing is about telling a story. I spent this morning in bed reading about Chinese art, trying to understand through their objects how they thought and how they understood the world. Or like I say in this collection: "She looks like she's going to Canterbury." It's the equivalent of opening a book and looking at a medieval manuscript. And it's the same with this biography: it's a story, what I want to say, in fashion, in activism, in life. It's not a *copy*. It can't be the whole of me. It's *inspired* by something. You make something by being inspired; like a breath drawn in – that here she is: a pilgrim. The cloak she is wearing has to be the best of all possible cloaks. It has to be Joseph's coat of many colours. It has to be the cloak of the Wizard of Oz. It has to be the troubadour's cloak. If you can breathe in those references, you have something that sums up the whole idea of "cloak". To sum up the whole idea of "Vivienne", not that I am sure I want to or that one could, you'd need to find the references; the ideas from the past and the goals for the future. Like this cloak. This is what gives clothes timelessness, you see. Weight. That there's something to relate to. Like a kind of nostalgia. Like knowing that you've always loved Paris. A sort of nostalgia for something that you already know. When you see it, you know. That's something I understand, I recognize. If I have a talent, I think that is it.'

Vivienne suddenly looks at me. 'Do you know *Pinocchio*?' she says, pronouncing it as an Italian would if they came from Glossop. 'The real one, not the film. I've never seen the film. That would be on the top of my reading list, with *Alice in Wonderland*. You have to be your best self. That's part of the story I want us to tell. Be your best self. And follow your conscience.'

'It's like when you make a collection: you start to think of a story. A frame. Here it is. This is what's happening with me right now. The moment of attention I have off you, off anybody reading this book,

I have to use to the best purpose. You have to look for the beauty. In everything. In every moment. And everyone.

“Once upon a time,” as *Pinocchio* has it, “there was just this little piece of wood . . .”